

September 2000

Review of *Managing to Make it: Urban Families and Adolescent Success*. Frank Furstenberg Jr., Thomas D. Cook, Jacquelynne Eccles, Glen H. Elder Jr., and Arnold Sameroff. Reviewed by Deborah Page-Adams, University of Kansas.

Deborah Page-Adams
University of Kansas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Page-Adams, Deborah (2000) "Review of *Managing to Make it: Urban Families and Adolescent Success*. Frank Furstenberg Jr., Thomas D. Cook, Jacquelynne Eccles, Glen H. Elder Jr., and Arnold Sameroff. Reviewed by Deborah Page-Adams, University of Kansas." *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 3 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol27/iss3/13>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



of social development theory, which calls for the integration of economic and social investments as strategies in combating poverty. Community organizers, policy makers, and political leaders, whether they are from rural or urban communities, would do well to read this book.

Perhaps the only drawback to Duncan's work is that, while it was written in an era of welfare reform and retrenchments in social services, the author does not acknowledge the impact of the new legislation on the population under study. To some extent, welfare reform, with its mandates for employment-related activities, will mitigate the lack of access to opportunity. How much it is able to do so is not clear, and some would argue that the legislation will further entrench discriminatory practices in communities such as Blackwell and Dahlia. Whatever the case may be, the author needs to visit the subject and identify the impact of welfare reform. This would only strengthen an already strong presentation on rural poverty in America.

William Rainford

University of California, Berkeley

Frank F. Furstenberg Jr., Thomas D. Cook, Jacquelynne Eccles, Glen H. Elder Jr. and Arnold Sameroff. *Managing to Make It: Urban Families and Adolescent Success*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999. \$32.50 hardcover.

While there have been many studies on parenting and the well-being of children, too few of them have focused explicitly on the link between family and community that may play a central role in the transition to adulthood. This book, by sociologist Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. and an interdisciplinary team of colleagues, is about parenting strategies that are tied to successful early adolescent development within the context of disadvantaged communities.

Managing to Make It builds on the theoretical traditions of Weber and Dahrendorf who conceptualized ways in which structural opportunities and limitations, or life chances, are internalized and thereby shape future possibilities. The authors note the importance of interdisciplinary scholarship including the work of Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn, Coleman, Jencks and

Mayer, South and Crowder, and Wilson in laying a foundation for this study. Though important research on adolescent success by economists Green and White is omitted, the attempt to break down disciplinary boundaries is one strength of this book. Other strengths of the book include its balanced attention to individual and structural factors associated with adolescent success and its especially thorough review of the social capital literature.

In this seven year study, Furstenberg and his colleagues used various methodologies including ethnographic research in five Philadelphia neighborhoods, a survey of 486 parents and young adolescents from 65 census tracts in low-income sections of the city, and in-depth follow-up interviews with 35 of the survey participants. The researchers offer a balanced discussion of the quality of the data, and provide helpful methodological appendices. They are careful not to overstate their findings given the use of telephone surveys, operationalization of neighborhoods as census tracts, and exclusion of the wealthiest and poorest sections of Philadelphia. Furstenberg and his colleagues detail these potential limitations, and then go on to note that their sample is representative of households with listed numbers living in broad areas of the inner city. The authors make effective use of their qualitative material to illustrate quantitative findings.

The central premise of the book is that parents provide a key connection between the larger community and adolescent well-being. Further, the role of parents in managing risks and opportunities outside the home may be particularly important for adolescents who live in disadvantaged communities. Furstenberg and his colleagues explore ways in which parents develop opportunities for adolescents; supervise relationships between adolescents, peers, and authority figures; and monitor interactions between adolescents and institutions including schools, churches, social service agencies, and corporate employers in the larger community.

The researchers find compelling evidence that managing risks and opportunities for adolescents is a parenting role of central importance. They also find that the majority of parents in their study are functioning relatively well in this role, despite the fact that almost half of them are living in or near poverty. They note, however, that success in early adolescence depends on effective

parenting in combination with social opportunity as evidenced by good schools, good social services, and good employment settings in the larger community. Within the urban context, parents who are warm and caring, effective disciplinarians, able to give adolescents increasing amounts of autonomy as they grow, skilled at locating opportunities for their children in the larger community, and capable of advocating for them in various settings outside of the home improve their children's chances of success in early adolescence. The researchers also find that this kind of parenting is just as common in single-parent as in two-parent families. Further, parents who live in poor neighborhoods are just as likely to effectively manage risks and opportunities for their adolescents as parents living in neighborhoods with more resources.

In fact, one of the most important contributions of this book is its challenge to our assumptions about the strength of neighborhood effects on adolescent outcomes. Furstenberg and his colleagues explore several factors that are widely thought to be central to the successful transition to adulthood and found more variance within neighborhoods than between neighborhoods. On this key point, they write "We found virtually no neighborhood-level differences in academic competence, acting out, parents' assessments of their children's adjustment, or the children's self-assessment of their mental health. The single exception to this pattern was involvement in prosocial activities, which was moderately associated with neighborhood quality and level of advantage" (p.219). The authors note that similar findings are emerging from other current studies, and suggest that we may be overestimating neighborhood effects on early adolescent outcomes. They are careful to note that the strength of neighborhood effects on later adolescence needs further research.

This book is well-written and, with the exception of some table headings, generally well-edited. Furstenberg and his colleagues have done an expert job reporting their findings about the central role of parenting in early adolescent success without letting readers forget the larger context of the challenges parents face in an age of dwindling public resources for child and family welfare. The book is the first in a series sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation on the development of adolescents living

in high-risk environments. If this first offering is any indication, the series will make an important contribution to the literature on successful youth development in urban areas. *Managing to Make It* will be particularly useful to those teaching courses on child welfare, urban studies, social and economic development, and social welfare policy.

Deborah Page-Adams
University of Kansas

Kevin Bales, *Disposable people: New Slavery in the Global Economy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999. \$24.95 hardcover.

The central argument of Kevin Bales' *Disposable People* is that slavery—understood as the total control of one person by another for purposes of economic exploitation—has not disappeared globally since the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century. On the contrary, in some places such as Mauritania old forms of slavery have persisted and adapted while in places such as Thailand, it has increased with economic growth. Bales provides five instances of contemporary slavery—Thailand, Mauritania, Brazil, Pakistan and India. Each country study includes personal histories, a description of the political, legal and economic context and reference to both the local and global forces at work, including efforts to end slavery. In each case he seeks to understand slavery culturally and contextually, without forgiving it.

While the subject matter of the book is grim and disturbing, its message is hopeful and Bales has a clear vision of what should be done. The hope stems from the author's own sense of moral outrage as well as from the people in the national and local level monitoring, campaigning and relief organisations with whom he worked. Sometimes as research subjects and sometimes as research collaborators, they contributed generously to making the study possible, as Bales is quick to acknowledge. Along with international organisations opposing slavery, he calls them the 'new abolitionists' and trusts that his research will help provide legitimacy and publicity for their cause.

However, hope does not spring from the lives described by Bales. Relating the story of Siri, a child prostitute enslaved in a